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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### IMPACT OF HEALTH TOURISM ON THE GROWTH OF TOURISM NICHES OF KERALA.

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#### Abstract

People like to travel to distant parts of the world to see great buildings or other works of art, to learn new languages, to experience new cultures or to taste new cuisine. The purpose of travel may vary with the taste and interest of each person. Tourism destinations have to develop different forms of tourism so as to cope up with the needs of different types of tourists. To excel in the field of tourism a country must develop niche tourism. Optimum utilisation of available tourism resources is possible through niche tourism.

Different forms of tourism include adventure tourism, agri tourism, ancestry tourism, cultural tourism, eco tourism, heritage tourism, health tourism, pilgrimage tourism, space tourism, monsoon tourism, backwater tourism etc. This study focuses on the role of health tourism on the promotion of niche tourism of Kerala. The new trend among people is to travel for healthcare. Health conscious people prefer to travel to healthcare destinations. Through health tourism one can enjoy the beauty of flora and fauna, cultural programme etc; of the healthcare destination in addition to medical treatment.

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#### Introduction:-

Travelling has become an easy task with the advancement of technology. Large numbers of people can reach to places of leisure interest within a short span of time. Currently people are travelling to tourist destinations seeking healthcare. People prefer to take wellness treatment outside their home country where the quality of healthcare is of high standard and the cost is significantly low. They are called health tourists as their main purpose of travel is for healthcare. Here the concept of health tourism emerges as the healthcare providers offer numerous options for touring, sight-seeing, shopping and exploring healthy diets.

Kerala has emerged as the most acclaimed tourist destination in the country. Beaches, warm weather, backwaters, hill stations, waterfalls, wild life, Ayurveda, art forms, festivals and the diverse flora and fauna make Kerala a unique destination for tourists. Kerala has world class medical infrastructure and can provide quality healthcare about 10% of the cost of the same procedure in the US or UK. Even on the domestic front, cost of treatment in Kerala will only be about 60% as compared to the cost of other healthcare destinations in India like Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. If managed effectively, tourism can be an important catalyst for the development of other economic sectors within the state, such as manufacturing, construction and the service industries. It can also help to protect Kerala's primary assets, namely its largely unspoiled natural and cultural environment.

#### Components of Health Tourism:-

The terms health tourism, medical tourism and wellness tourism are used interchangeably. However, medical tourism is normally used for health tourists taking medical treatment like surgery, hip replacement etc; in multi-speciality hospitals. Wellness tourism is related with fitness and alternative therapies for health maintenance and healing. It includes treatment regarding rejuvenation of body, mind and soul through herbal massage, yoga and meditation. Health tourism combines both medical tourism and wellness tourism. For this study health tourism is segregated into nine components.

- ❖ **Medical tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for medical treatment like surgery etc; in multi-speciality hospitals.
- ❖ **Ayurveda tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for taking ayurvedic treatment in hospitals
- ❖ **Dental tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for dental treatment.
- ❖ **Eye Care tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for seeking treatment in eye care hospitals.
- ❖ **Cosmetic tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for cosmetic surgeries.
- ❖ **Spa tourism:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for visiting spa resorts.
- ❖ **Siddha/ Unani:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for taking traditional medicines.
- ❖ **Yoga and Meditation:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for practising yoga and meditation.
- ❖ **Kalari Treatment:-** Persons travelling to healthcare destinations for taking treatment from marshal arts masters.

### Methodology:-

The main objective of the study is to identify the influence of health tourism on other forms of tourism in Kerala. Questionnaire is used for collecting data from health tourists. The size of sample taken for the study is 370 international health tourists who visited Kerala.

### Results and Discussions:-

#### Effect of Health Tourism on Other Forms of Tourism:-

Countries offering tourism creates different niches of tourism depending on the tourism resources available in their nation for the optimum use of tourism resources. Niche tourism aims to attract tourists of varying tastes and interest. Niche tourism highlights specific tourism attractions like back waters, beaches, hill stations, farms, cultural and heritage centres, pilgrimage centres, health resorts etc. By highlighting each form of tourism a destination can attract prospective tourists with different preferences.

Kerala is blessed with almost all forms of tourism resources such as back waters, beaches, hill stations, farms, cultural and heritage centres, pilgrimage centres, health resorts, water falls, festivals etc. Ayurveda and Kerala are synonymous to each other. Kerala is suited for every one even if their preferences and tastes in various forms of tourism vary as they can enjoy different forms of tourism by traveling a short distance.

#### Different Forms of Tourism Enjoyed by Health Tourists:-

The main purpose of visiting a tourism destination may varies to each tourists but a well developed tourism destination can attract them into other forms of tourism. Health tourism has a positive impact on other forms of tourism as health tourists choosing a healthcare tourism destination based on its tourism resources also. Following table shows the different niche tourism areas of Kerala visited by health tourists during their healthcare travel.

#### Tourism Areas Visited during the Health care Tour

Sl.No	Tourist Spots	Percentage of tourists	Rank
1	Back Water	76.22	1
2	Beach	62.97	2
3	Farms	62.43	3
4	Eco tourism spots	60.81	4
5	Hill Stations	50.00	5
6	Shopping Malls	39.73	6
7	Cultural Centres	39.19	7
8	Pilgrimage	37.30	8
9	Historical places	36.49	9
Source Primary Data			

Majority of the health tourists had visited back water, beach, farm and eco tourism areas of Kerala during their healthcare tour to Kerala. Only less than 40 percent of the health tourists had visited shopping malls, cultural tourism areas, pilgrimage tourism areas and historical places of Kerala during their healthcare tour.

#### Desire to Revisit Different Forms of Tourism:-

Niche tourism is successful as it brings more potential tourists to a tourism destination. A tourist visiting Kerala with the main purpose of taking Ayurveda spa therapy can be normally attracted to other forms of tourism. For example

if the health resort is situated near back waters an interest to travel in a cruise to enjoy the beauty of back waters may be emerged in the minds of tourists.

By knowing and experiencing tourism destination, a tourist evaluates the destination and decides whether to revisit that destination in the near future. He also determines different niche tourism areas to be enjoyed at the time of his revisit. Following table shows details regarding the interest of health tourists desire to visit different niche tourism areas of Kerala.

#### Desire to Visit Different Forms of Tourism

Tourism Area	Desire					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Eco tourism	284 (76.76)	69 (18.65)	0 (0)	13 (3.51)	4 (1.08)	370 (100)
Beach tourism	253 (68.38)	111 (30)	0 (0)	6 (1.62)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Farm tourism	219 (59.19)	148 (40)	0 (0)	3 (0.81)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Pilgrimage	161 (43.51)	174 (47.03)	0 (0)	29 (7.84)	6 (1.62)	370 (100)
Adventure	119 (32.16)	114 (30.81)	36 (9.73)	101 (27.30)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Health centres	233 (62.97)	78 (21.08)	0 (0)	51 (13.78)	8 (2.16)	370 (100)
Historic areas	175 (47.30)	135 (36.49)	21 (5.68)	39 (10.54)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Cultural	119 (32.17)	161 (43.51)	0 (0)	75 (20.27)	15 (4.05)	370 (100)
Shopping	136 (30.81)	120 (32.43)	14 (8.38)	100 (28.38)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Back water	266 (71.89)	96 (25.95)	0 (0)	8 (2.16)	0 (0)	370 (100)

Source Primary Data

- Figures in brackets () are percentages

Majority of health tourists would like to visit eco tourism areas (95.41%), beach tourism areas (98.38%), farm tourism areas (99.19%), back water tourism areas (97.84%), pilgrimage tourism areas (90.54%), health tourism centres (84.05), historical places (83.79%), cultural centres (75.68%), shopping malls (63.24%) and adventure tourism areas (62.97%) of Kerala in future.

#### Health Tourists Opinion about Kerala's Health Tourism:-

Satisfied customers are good ambassadors of a product. Therefore, if the health tourists are satisfied with the services received from health tourism providers of Kerala they will strongly recommend Kerala as a health tourism destination to their friends and relatives that will lead to the increased demand of Kerala's health tourism. Following table shows health tourists opinion about Kerala as a health tourism destination.

#### Health Tourists Opinion about Kerala's Health Tourism.

Opinion	Desire					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Visit Kerala Again	320 (86.49)	48 (12.97)	0 (0)	2 (0.54)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Recommend Kerala as a Health Tourism Destination	222 (60)	136 (36.76)	0 (0)	12 (3.24)	0 (0)	370 (100)
Recommend Kerala as a Tourism Destination	307 (82.97)	63 (17.03)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	370 (100)

Source Primary Data

- Figures in brackets () are percentages

All respondents (370 health tourists) expect 2 persons would like to revisit Kerala. Majority of health tourists would like to recommend Kerala as a health tourism destination to their friends and relatives.

**Conclusion:-**

More tourists can be attracted to Kerala by highlighting Kerala as a health tourism destination. Kerala offers a wide variety of tourist attractions and Kerala's small land area gives it the added advantage of being the best venture for multi-destination tourism